



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 28, 2022

First Lady Wolf Joins College Students, Administrators, Advocates and Legislators in Calling for Action to Address College Hunger

Harrisburg, PA – First Lady Frances Wolf joined Senate Democratic Appropriations Chairman Vincent Hughes, Senator Carolyn Comitta, House Democratic Leader Joanna McClinton, Representative Jennifer O'Mara, college students and advocates to call for action to address food insecurity on Pennsylvania's college campuses.

"College should *not* be a privilege reserved for individuals with disposable incomes, and hunger should *never* be what holds someone back from succeeding in higher education," said First Lady Wolf. "And yet, national studies estimate that over 30 percent of college students are food insecure. We must do all we can to support our students as they pursue futures that can benefit all of Pennsylvania."

In his 2022-23 budget proposal, Governor Tom Wolf allocated \$1 million to create a grant program that could help Pennsylvania's institutions of higher education address this issue on their campuses.

This program could help schools create or expand campus food pantries, increase outreach about available supports, hire social workers or benefits navigators to assist students, improve data gathering efforts, and more. The details of the program are still being developed, but it is inspired by the Hunger-Free Campus bills that Sen. Comitta and Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta have proposed in recent years.

When coupled with the proposed budget increases for the postsecondary sector, this investment could have very positive impacts on our students and school communities by reducing barriers impacting college and career goal attainment

"COVID exposed an unspoken secret, that a significant number of college students are food insecure," Sen Hughes said. "Thanks to the leadership of the First Lady and

Governor Wolf, we have an opportunity to make an impact to reverse the staggering number of college students who are food insecure. College students face enough challenges without needing to worry about where their next meal will come from.”

An estimated 36 percent of students know someone who dropped out of college due to food insecurity during the pandemic, and roughly 52 percent of students who faced food or housing insecurity in 2020 did not apply for support because they did not know how.

“There is growing awareness at Penn State and on other college campuses of the significant impediment to student success caused by food insecurity. A student who lacks access to sufficient and healthy food simply cannot learn and participate as they otherwise would,” said Pennsylvania State University’s Vice President of Student Affairs Damon Sims. “It has been heartening to see the commitment of our student leaders to meaningfully address this fundamental issue in partnership with the Penn State administration. The funding proposed by Governor Wolf would make an enormous difference in our collective effort to overcome a challenge faced by too many students across the Commonwealth. We can all do better by these students, and I know we shall.”

All Penn State campuses have food pantries on campus or in the community. Most campuses offer either food pantries, food distribution services, and/or campus community gardens. Penn State President Eric J. Barron and First Lady Molly Barron recently established a food security endowment that will support to purchase University meal plans for undergraduate Penn State students who encounter food insecurity.

A 2018 report released by the federal Government Accountability Office found that about half of all undergraduate students in 2016 were financially independent and the average age of a college student was 25 years old. About 22 percent of all undergrads had dependent children of their own and 14 percent were single parents.

Many college students who *are* coming out of high school have relied on free or reduced priced meals throughout their education. Those programs do not exist for college students – even though the student’s socio-economic status likely has not changed. The food challenges they had in grade school follow them into the next phase of their lives and may even become more challenging as they juggle new financial responsibilities like housing, books, and other costs.

“No student should have to go hungry to pursue the dream of higher education and career success. Studies and firsthand stories tell us that food and basic needs insecurity is a growing program on college campuses. Common sense tells us it’s a solvable one. And we’re working to take steps to solve it in Pennsylvania,” Sen. Comitta said. “I thank the First Lady for her commitment to ending hunger on campus, Governor Wolf for supporting the Hunger-Free Campus Initiative in his budget plan, and our students and anti-hunger organizations for their ongoing advocacy efforts.”

"The cost of higher education in Pennsylvania continues to rise while financial aid fails to keep up, and this can force students to financially neglect other areas of their lives. Food insecurity on college campuses has been a problem for decades, and Pennsylvania is overdue in addressing this," said Rep. O'Mara. "Students cannot thrive and reach their full potential if their basic needs are not being met. We need to pass the Hunger-Free Campus Act that I introduced in the House alongside State Rep. Malcom Kenyatta and provide for students throughout the commonwealth".

National nonprofit Swipe Out Hunger brought approximately 100 students and school administrators to the State Capitol on Monday to meet with legislators and advocate for change.

Students from the following schools were in attendance: Bloomsburg University, Carnegie Mellon University, Community College of Allegheny County, California University of Pennsylvania, DeSales University, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Millersville University, Point Park University, Prism Career Institute, Robert Morris University, Temple University, University of Pittsburgh, University of Pennsylvania, West Chester University, Widener University, and Wilson College.

"It speaks volumes to have the First Lady support our coalition of more than 100 college students across Pennsylvania and other community partners to address student food insecurity through the Hunger Free Campus Bill," said Rachel Sumekh, founder and CEO of Swipe Out Hunger. "We're thrilled to galvanize and organize together to ensure no student has to choose between food and their education."

Sumekh's organization works closely with leaders on-the-ground to not only ensure today's students have access to meals, but to also address student hunger upstream with sustainable legislation and policies. Their national movement spans more than 400 colleges in all 50 states and has served 2.5 million nutritious meals to date.

To learn about college food and basic need insecurities, visit Temple University's Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice website at hope4college.com.

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